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Writing Lab Strategic Plan

Linda S. Bergmann

Tammy Conard-Salvo

Vicki Kennell

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Strategic Plan¹

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¹ Contributors to this document are as follows: Linda S. Bergmann, Tammy Conard-Salvo, Vicki Kennell, Jeff Gerding, Daniel Kenzie, Mary McCall, Joshua Paiz, R. Scott Partridge, Caitlan Spronk, and former Writing Lab tutors and staff. The document was finished in 2014 and represents a five-year projection of goals.

Writing Lab History and Background

The Purdue Writing Lab, which opened in 1976, supports all writers on the West Lafayette campus. Since the introduction of the Purdue OWL in 1995, we have expanded the scope of our services to include the global community. We strive to innovate our services through academic research, feedback from clients, cooperative partnerships, and careful revision of our training and strategies. We welcome employees and clients from various backgrounds and acknowledge the strength of diversity. Further, we seek to foster an open and welcoming learning environment for all writers.

The primary service of the Writing Lab remains its free one-to-one consultations. Consultants provide feedback on documents in any discipline: essays, research papers, personal statements, résumés, cover letters, PowerPoints, and multimedia writing. The Writing Lab has four locations in which consultations occur: the main location in 226 Heavilon Hall and three satellite locations with evening hours in the HSSE Library, the Latino Cultural Center, and the MSEE Atrium.

Writers make half-hour appointments with consultants who will provide careful and non-judgmental feedback. However, the Writing Lab is not an editing or proofreading service; writers would not learn anything from having their papers edited by someone else. Instead, consultants are trained to focus on writing in all stages, from prewriting before a draft is written to polishing a final draft. Consultants address global concerns such as organization, invention, and clarity before discussing sentence-level concerns, and they are prepared to teach editing and proofreading strategies to help writers learn to identify and correct their own errors. Consultants work with writers at all levels—from first-year to graduate students, postdocs, and staff—on documents in all disciplines, including job search materials, creative pieces, business and technical writing, and multimedia writing.

In addition to consultations, the Writing Lab also provides writing-related workshops, assists English as a Second Language (ESL) students with writing-related concerns, and has a number of online services. The Online Writing Lab (OWL) offers web-based support materials to students and faculty on academic writing, research, grammar, and discipline-specific writing concerns. OWL Mail Consultants answer brief questions about writing by email, and announcements about OWL and the Writing Lab are made via the Purdue OWL News, Twitter, and Facebook.

In addition, the Purdue Writing Lab and OWL serve as benchmarks for other writing centers and online writing labs in the U.S. and abroad. Visitors from as far away as Afghanistan and Columbia travel to the Writing Lab to learn more about writing center theory and practice and to learn how to establish their own writing centers.

Mission Statement

The Purdue University Writing Lab and Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) assist clients in their development as writers—no matter what their skill level—with on-campus services, online participation, and community engagement. The Purdue Writing Lab serves the Purdue-West Lafayette campus and coordinates with local literacy initiatives, while the Purdue OWL offers global support through online reference materials and services.

Writing Lab and OWL Staff

Director: faculty member in English

Associate Director: Tammy Conard-Salvo, M.A., Administrative/Professional

ESL Specialist: Vicki Kennell, Ph.D., Administrative/Professional

17 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs): writing consultants who work with students from any discipline, at all levels. Four GTAs serve in the following administrative positions:

- Business Writing Coordinator
- OWL Mail Coordinator
- Workshop and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Coordinator
- Writing Lab/Introductory Composition at Purdue (ICaP) Liaison

Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (UTAs): undergraduate writing consultants from various majors who primarily work with first-year composition students.

Business Writing Consultants (BWCs): undergraduate writing consultants with backgrounds in business, technical or professional writing who offer feedback on workplace documents and course assignments.

OWL (Online Writing Lab) Staff: OWL Technical Coordinator/Webmaster, responsible for programming and maintaining online resources, and OWL Coordinator, responsible for content development.

Support staff: receptionist, secretary, and 3-4 work study assistants.

Current Use

During the 2012-2013 academic year, there were 6,089 visits to the Writing Lab by 2,149 Purdue University students and instructors, who came to the Lab for one-to-one consultations, English language conversation groups, self-study resources, computer use, in-lab workshops, writing groups, and handouts. Writing Lab consultants gave 26 in-class workshops (by request), 16 in-Lab workshops, and 16 brown bags for ICaP instructors. The OWL served 248,242,901 pages, and the OWL Mail service answered 2,407 writing-related inquiries.

Current Services

One-to-One Tutorials: thirty-minute consultations, either by appointment or drop in

ESL Conversation Groups: daily, hour-long, informal discussion groups focusing on language, writing, and cultural issues

OWL Mail: responses from tutors on brief writing, grammar, and citation questions

In-Lab Workshops: workshops on general writing topics held several times per semester and open to anyone on campus

In-Class/General Workshops: customized workshops by request for instructors outside the English department

Instructor Consultation: opportunities for instructors to receive information about or assistance with teaching writing

Purdue Writing Lab Mission Goals and Plans

The purpose of these goals is to articulate the current initiatives within the Writing Lab as well as the objectives of our five-year plan. Generally, both our short- and long-term goals span a range of purposes: expanding our outreach to the Purdue community through interdisciplinary support, increasing resources for ESL tutoring and training, maintaining and developing our Purdue OWL, extending our diversity training, and promoting research from writing support initiatives. Overall, we believe that our four major goals, which we outline in more detail below, align with our Writing Lab's mission to serve Purdue University and its students through both local and global writing support.

Mission Goal 1: Supporting Campus Writers

To help clients at Purdue-West Lafayette with documents in any stage of the writing process, in any discipline, in any medium, and in any genre.

1.1 Current Activities

- 1.1.1 Provide discipline-specific support through the Business Writing Consultant program and collaboration with Animal Sciences (ANSC) 311 and Mechanical Engineering.
- 1.1.2 Open a satellite location in MSEE to reach more Engineering students.
- 1.1.3 Collect documents from Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) to improve training on tutoring Engineering documents.
- 1.1.4 Hire undergraduate tutors from across majors.
- 1.1.5 Offer intensive ESL training each spring.
- 1.1.6 Pilot graduate writing groups.

1.2 Five -Year Plan

- 1.2.1 Increase and improve training for tutoring writing in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines.
- 1.2.2 Increase ESL support services and programming; develop writing support system in collaboration with other departments on campus.
- 1.2.3 Create more tutoring resources for ESL tutoring.
- 1.2.4 Offer workshops to students to teach strategies for self-editing and proofreading.

- 1.2.5 Reconsider productive use of the editor's list.
- 1.2.6 Increase publicity for workshops.
- 1.2.7 Offer faculty/instructor support for teaching of writing, including but not limited to support for WAC/WID and ESL writers.
- 1.2.8 Continue developing and sustaining writing groups.
- 1.2.9 Launch Virtual Consultant at Purdue (VCaP) online tutoring system for Purdue students.

1.3 Rationale

Overall, our goals of providing Purdue students, faculty, and staff a range of free services (including tutoring, ESL and discipline-specific writing support, workshops, and writing groups) reflect our commitment to keeping these types of support accessible and affordable to the larger Purdue community. In the same vein, our goal to launch the VCaP online tutoring system will make our tutoring services more accessible to students who are living off campus, studying abroad, or who are otherwise unavailable to attend our on-campus locations. Moreover, the creation of our MSEE satellite location as well as our focus on developing training for engineering documents aligns with Purdue's dedication to STEM leadership and research. Finally, our short- and long-term goals of sustaining and extending our ESL training and support services demonstrate our attention to serving Purdue's notable international student population, which is reflected within our client demographics.

Mission Goal 2: Global Initiatives and Engagement

To provide world-class resources and services to the global community through the Purdue OWL.

2.1 Current Activities

- 2.1.1 Provide discipline-specific support through the Business Writing Consultant program and collaboration with ANSC 311 and Mechanical Engineering.
- 2.1.2 Offer more than 300 static resources, including web pages and PPT presentations.
- 2.1.3 Continue YouTube channel development.
- 2.1.4 Provide answers to short, specific questions through OWL Mail.

2.2 Five-Year Plan

- 2.2.1 Release a mobile version of the OWL for mobile browsers.
- 2.2.2 Conduct a new usability study for the entire site.
- 2.2.3 Expand resources in STEM and ESL.
- 2.2.4 Develop resources for faculty.
- 2.2.5 Rethink presentation of Engagement projects and partnerships.
- 2.2.6 Clarify OWL Mail service to users, especially when the VCaP online tutoring system goes live. OWL Mail will remain accessible to the general public, while VCaP will serve Purdue writers only.
- 2.2.7 Make existing videos more accessible on the site. Expand video and other multimedia content.
- 2.2.8 Communicate with teachers worldwide about OWL Mail and how best to use it.

2.3 Rationale

The five-year plan for the OWL focuses on remaining accessible and relevant in a landscape of changing technology, as well as expanding content to serve a wider variety of users from a growing number of national contexts. In order to remain accessible to a worldwide audience, the OWL will build a mobile version of the site to reflect changes in how users access the web. The OWL will also undergo usability testing to provide staff with insight for redesign to suit users' needs. In order to enhance learning for a greater diversity of users, we will expand content for faculty, STEM disciplines, and ESL users. We will provide a better explanation of the kinds of services OWL Mail provides in order to better use tutors' and users' time.

Mission Goal 3: Diversity and Critical Thinking

To promote responsible academic inquiry, critical thinking, and the expression of diversity.

3.1 Current Activities

- 3.1.1 Support information literacy through tutorials that address the research process, identifying sources, and incorporating research.
- 3.1.2 Offer diversity training in English 390A and English 390B.
- 3.1.3 Provide mid-semester lab tours to students in the Purdue Promise program.

- 3.1.4 Address international cultural diversity through ESL training and support for ESL students.

3.2 Five-Year Plan

- 3.2.1 Create closer connections to the Libraries.
- 3.2.2 Offer an appropriate diversity training program for graduate tutors.
- 3.2.3 Collaborate with the department's programs to develop a diversity network.
- 3.2.4 Extend the diversity training for undergraduates beyond English 390A and English 390B.
- 3.2.5 Reach out to cultural centers and student organizations on campus to collaborate and better meet the needs of underrepresented students, particularly domestic students.
- 3.2.6 Develop stronger ties with Purdue Promise and similar programs.

3.3 Rationale

The Writing Lab is dedicated to serving all Purdue writers including international students, visiting scholars, and faculty. This commitment to promote and support diversity extends to all people and is essential for creating an open, safe, caring, and productive learning environment. As a recognized site for interdisciplinary interaction, the Writing Lab upholds high standards for cultivating critical thinking, encouraging students to be more open-minded, and reflecting more diversity in our practices. The Writing Lab also supports faculty and instructors during their development of writing assignments and in their efforts to promote critical thinking.

Mission Goal 4: Research and Professional Development

To serve the Purdue community and the larger academic community by promoting the Writing Lab as a site for writing-related research and fostering professional development for Writing Lab staff.

4.1 Current Activities

- 4.1.1 Initiate and conduct research about writing and tutoring through conference presentations, dissertation projects, publications, etc.
- 4.1.2 Collaborate with other departments to develop research from writing support initiatives.
- 4.1.3 Connect research to community engagement; produce resources based on research.

- 4.1.4 Support tutor travel to conferences and other professional development activities with the Harris Fund.

4.2 Five-Year Plan

- 4.2.1 Improve data collection for Writing Lab usage and connect with the university's data banks/COGNOS.
- 4.2.2 Disseminate Writing Lab and OWL research and projects through the Libraries E-Pubs Repository.
- 4.2.3 Increase the Writing Lab's research profile.

4.3 Rationale

The Writing Lab provides an additional site for learning that compliments the traditional classroom, making it an ideal setting for testing new methods of teaching and learning writing. Buoyed by prominent graduate programs in rhetoric and composition and second language studies, the Writing Lab is a global leader in research into writing center practice and OWLs. The Lab also connects community engagement initiatives to research, which enhances its local and global outreach.

Glossary of Terms

ANSC 311 (Animal Science 311): The Writing Lab has supported student writing in this class by working with students on professional letters, abstracts, other business documents, and scientific reports.

Brown Bags: These interactive, pedagogically-focused workshops are designed for graduate instructors and lecturers in the English department.

Business Writing Consultants: BWCs are undergraduate students who major in professional writing, management, or similar fields. They take a tutoring practicum course before they are hired and tutor students with business, professional, and technical writing documents such as resumes, cover letters, memos, white papers, and reports.

Global Concerns (also Higher Order Concerns): These are larger issues such as clarity, organization, argument or claim, thesis statement, development, and support. Global concerns are often addressed before sentence-level issues because they relate to the overall content and structure of a document, whether the document addresses an audience or fulfills a purpose.

Graduate Tutors: GTAs are graduate students in the department of English who have at least one year of teaching experience in Purdue's introductory composition program. They tutor both graduate and undergraduate students across the disciplines and address concerns in any type of document.

Harris Fund: The Muriel Harris Fund for Tutor Development supports conference travel for Writing Lab student staff, based on donations from Writing Lab alumni. It is named for the Writing Lab's first director.

OWL Mail: This service allows users to submit short writing-related questions to Writing Lab tutors through a contact form on the Purdue OWL. Tutors answer by email, typically within two weeks.

Proofreading (also Editing): This occurs when writers search for sentence-level errors, both grammatical and typographical. Because the focus is on issues of mechanics, rather than global concerns, proofreading is generally reserved for the final draft of a document.

Purdue Promise: This program is offered through Student Success at Purdue and supports qualified undergraduate students with academic and financial resources.

Satellite Location: These Writing Lab locations offers drop-in consultations for students, faculty, and staff during the evening. Satellites extend the Writing Lab's consultations to places around campus. Specific locations were added as a result of collaboration with different departments and programs.

Undergraduate Teaching Assistants: UTAs are undergraduate students from any major who tutor students in first-year composition courses. They take a tutoring practicum course before they are hired.

Virtual Consultant at Purdue: VCaP is the Writing Lab's asynchronous online tutoring system in development. It will provide tutorials to writers at the West Lafayette campus, including those participating in study-abroad or online degree programs. Writers will be able to submit documents, along with contextual and background information, and receive feedback from trained consultants.

Writing Lab Research Repository: This digital repository, hosted by Purdue Libraries e-Pubs, e-Archives, and PURR, will collect both published and unpublished Writing Lab research and other related documents and data of interest to the Purdue and writing center communities.

Writing Across the Curriculum (also WAC, Writing in the Disciplines or WID): This subfield within Composition and Rhetoric supports writing instruction in majors outside of English studies. Programs often support faculty and courses that incorporate discipline- or field-specific writing.